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Ex-CIA agent, Belafonte decry U.S. foreign policy

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SOUTH KINGSTOWN — A former CIA official, who said his disillusionment grew during 13 years as a spymaster, told a URI audience last night he surrendered his belief that senior officials in Washington knew what was best for the country when he joined their ranks as chief of the agency's operations in Angola.

John Stockwell, who has been called a traitor in the U.S. Senate, was joined on the podium at the end of his two-hour speech by Harry Belafonte, the singer. Belafonte was also critical of United States foreign policy as it is played out in the Third World.

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STOCKWELL SAID the doubts that first surfaced for him in Vietnam were fully realized when a critical briefing he was giving to the National Security Council on the Angola situation degenerated into an argument involving Secretary of State Henry Kissinger over who should sit at the head of the table.

"I always believed, and was told as a lower-level CIA agent, that the graybeards in Washington knew the big picture and were doing what was best," he said.

Stockwell told the audience of 250, which gave him a standing ovation, that the United States government lied repeatedly to its people, the Congress and the United Nations about its multimillion-dollar covert operations in Angola.

"We did not want to tell people that we were paying white South African mercenaries to kill black people in Africa," he said, asserting that the people who run the CIA and the government have traded in the nation's democratic ideals and are selling guns, teaching torture and hiring killers to support "a friendly dictatorship at any price."

"I submit to you that if the CIA existed in 1933, it would have supported Hitler and had very good relations with the Gestapo," Stockwell said.

Belafonte asked the audience to question "why we are always finding ourselves on the wrong side in the Third World. Why are we

always on the side of the oppressor. We have been given such a bugaboo on the Communist question that we have forgotten the question of humanity and democracy."

"We are at the threshold of becoming what Hitler's Germany was when, at the height of its culture" with Brecht and its great theater, "there came Auschwitz and Dachau and all the other things," said Belafonte. "Are we prepared to watch this?"

Stockwell welcomed questions and warned his audience to be critical of his presentation, as he peppered his talk with references to books about foreign policy, history and documentation. He handed out a 15-page reading list at the end, and about 65 students left Edwards Auditorium to go with him to a nearby pub for beer and more discussion.

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STOCKWELL SAID the important issue for the world is to end the threat of nuclear destruction. This, he charged, is made more likely by CIA adventures throughout the world. He said the CIA support of anti-Sandinista forces in Nicaragua could easily play into a scenario for World War III.

"We are at the threshold of a nuclear war," he said.